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## EDITORIAL NOTES

We commented last month on certain radical criticisms on our present school system. Numerous other criticisms, some of them fundamental, are appearing with considerable frequency. In the *North American Review* for September, the results of examinations for entrance to West Point were set forth with the inquiry in substance: If the schools are injuring health and not achieving intellectual results, then is it worth while?

**THE NEED OF  
EDUCATIONAL  
INVESTIGATION**

Professor Cattell, in the January *Popular Science Monthly*, challenges the whole school system both in its methods and in its results. We do not accomplish what we pretend to be doing, and in so far as we do accomplish it the result is to do more harm than good. "The school work in arithmetic is of very little use." "The accuracy of spelling secured by school drill is useless." "Nothing much can be said in favor of geography, history, and literature as they are taught, or for such science as here and there appears." The schools set patterns of life which the majority of the pupils cannot follow with benefit to themselves or to the social order. Worst of all, our system is in influence and tendency subversive of the family. It re-enforces rather than offsets the injurious effects of city life for this institution. It sets fictitious value upon book learning, tends to make young people demand impossible standards of comfort for beginning family life, keeps young people at books until past the age when impulse is strong, and leaves them indifferent or averse to marriage. Many of those who marry after going through our school system have either no physiological ability or no mental disposition to have children. Every teacher should read this article, even if he may regard it as seeming to charge up to the schools faults due primarily to economic and social changes.

Other questions now coming to the front are those of the retardation of children and the causes for it, the early elimination of children from school, the best technique of reading and of writing, the relation of special training to general ability. The colleges, too, have troubles of their own, and such books as those of Birdseye and Flexner are calling attention to them.

It is needless to say that we do not refer to these questions just now for the sake of discussing them. Our whole point is rather that most of them, at least those which refer to processes and methods, are not subjects for discussion at all. They are matters for investigation. Fundamental questions of ends should be thought over and discussed, but even these are not to be settled without scientific method; on questions of process and

means it is in most cases fruitless to present opinions save as discussion sharpens the issue, focuses attention upon the right point, and then gains a hearing for the results which investigation may reach.

Many types of agencies are already at work, or are being established for studying these and similar problems. The busy teacher can scarcely be aware even of them all, except as they invade him with questionnaires or subject his pupils to various tests. It may be worth while to mention some of these, as the recent meetings at Baltimore of the American Association for the Advancement of Science brought them together.

*THE AGENCIES  
ENGAGED IN  
INVESTIGATION*

First was represented an agency closely related to the general school system itself. Commissioner Brown, as retiring vice-president of Section L, organized last year for the special study of educational problems, represented the national government. Investigations by the Bureau of Education have thus far been limited mainly, on account of meager appropriations, to the gathering of statistics. But the National Education Association last summer voted to suspend its own policy of investigations through committees and throw its influence in favor of legislation to enable the Bureau to carry on such investigations. The study of elimination made by Professor Thorndike for the Bureau the past year is illustrative of the work which this agency is perhaps better fitted than any other to undertake. We believe thoroughly that the Bureau ought to be given means for work on a far larger scale than at present. Closely related to the school system also is another agency, represented on the programme at this meeting—the department of child-study, now coming to be recognized as an important part of a great city's equipment. Abnormal or defective children, or those needing some medical attention to sense organs or glands, have received special attention from such a department as that in Chicago, but we may expect increasingly valuable results in various directions as methods and norms are worked out. In this connection may be mentioned also such a special commission as that established in Massachusetts to investigate the need of industrial education. Its work was admirable, and effective because scientifically done.

A different set of workers was represented at the meetings of the American Psychological Association. The university laboratories are giving increased attention to educational problems. Up to this time a disproportionate amount of attention has been given, and necessarily so, to the perfecting of apparatus and the developing of technique. But from the number of educational papers presented and the tone of the discussions it was apparent that the conditions are changing. No dissent was expressed from the view presented by Professor Kirkpatrick that while up to the present time psychological investigation has been important chiefly in the matter of adapting educational work to ages; and while in methods it has contributed almost nothing as demonstration though much in the way of suggestion, we may

reasonably expect much more in the future. Such work as Professor Schwarz has been reporting in the *Review* is indeed an earnest of fruitful effort.

Another type of agency is the independent foundation. This is the latest to enter the field. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, though associated in the public mind chiefly with its grants of pensions to college professors, is undertaking important studies of general educational significance. In its effort to define a college it is at once brought into contact with our secondary schools and their systems of units. The General Education Board makes similar inquiries, although it has not as yet published results. In this type belongs also the Russell Sage Foundation which, in investigating the causes of poverty, finds itself forced to examine our schools. In particular it is undertaking a study of retardation.

Finally, to be complete, we should have to recognize such voluntary societies as the Child Labor Committee, which is now urging the establishing of a Children's Bureau at Washington, to consider interests now scattered or unprovided for. And certainly among the numerous bureaus it would be difficult to name one that on the face of it has a more worthy end. Nevertheless the question of the relation of such a bureau to the Bureau of Education ought to be very carefully considered. Would it not be a desirable arrangement to make the Bureau of Education a full department, and organize the Children's Bureau as a special subdivision of it?

Such are some of the types of workers, nearly all of whom, together with teachers not chiefly engaged in educational investigation, are represented in such a gathering as that at Baltimore. As yet we are feeling our way. But we believe that gradually each agency will find what it can do best, and we may look to see a more solid basis laid for educational work. If we can show that we want to do something worth doing, that we know how to set about it, and that we are broad enough in our vision to look beyond our machinery to the larger personal and social welfare, means for investigation will not be wanting.

J. H. T.